

College Education Majors Learning to use Newspapers in the Classroom

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Sarah Hartman is a teacher of future teachers.

Hartman, an assistant professor of teacher education at College of Coastal Georgia, instructs education majors at the college, and for several years she has signed up for the Newspapers in Education program with The News, through which she receives copies of the newspaper several times a week to use in her classroom.

In her Social Studies Methods class, Hartman uses The News to show her senior middle school education majors how newspapers can be used to teach social studies.

“We’ve looked at how to interpret different forms of the media and use that to teach social studies with, and we’ve prepared old newspapers for primary documents and teaching with those compared to a new newspaper,” Hartman said.

She said teachers are often challenged to make the subject of social studies engaging to young students, and using alternative teaching tools other than textbooks can be a way to achieve that.

The CCGA class uses newspapers to evaluate current events, to compare current sources of media with media from years ago and to search for effective teaching methods and content as it relates to various topics discussed in class.

As part of a semester-long service-learning project, the class will be taking a group of nearly 100 eighth-grade students to the local cemetery in November, and they will use the gravestones to teach the students about local history. Each of the seniors has been assigned a gravestone in the cemetery and will spend the semester researching that person and using tools — like newspapers — as research sources as well as teaching instruments.

In her research so far, Erin Barksdale has already begun scanning the pages of newspapers printed locally when the person named on her gravestone died in the 19th Century.

In doing so, she said she's been able to see racial biases that existed in society and made their way into the printed news.

“The guy that I’m doing my headstone over is black, and I was wondering if (his death) would be documented in the paper, because of the differences in civil rights back then,” Barksdale said. “And I found out that it was, but the only reason is because he was helping save white people’s land.”

Barksdale also found that the man’s name had been spelled differently in the newspaper than on the gravestone.

“I don’t know when the headstone was put there — if it was at the same time (of his death) or later on,” she said. “But he died Nov. 16, and the paper was published Nov. 20.”



Hartman pointed out that one doesn’t read a newspaper the same way one reads a textbook.

Charile Postell, a CCGA senior, said newspapers provide a different perception of history.

“It’s not just a retelling, it has quotes in it,” he said. “It’s not textual so much as it is personal.”

Many of the students said they’re more likely to believe information in a newspaper than what they may find through a Google search.

“When I look stuff up online, I’m like ‘Is this legit, or did some guy in his mom’s basement post it on here?’” said Sarah Turner, a CCGA senior. “In a newspaper, obviously there’s some bias, but it’s a little bit more legitimate.”

Hartman said the source plays a role in how students will interpret information.

Newspapers can be used across content areas, Hartman said, including for subjects like reading, science and math.

“With English, you can use it because you can even have them create their own ad for the paper,” CCGA senior Katie Warren said. “And with history, you can look at current events now and look at what were current events in the past and see how things have changed.”

Postell said he’d use newspapers as an alternative source to provide students with a more enriching education.

“In a lot of ways, it’s more effective than looking it up on the internet, because you can use it to show students that information isn’t all online or in a book,” Postell said.

The good news for teachers is that there is always an opportunity to begin using newspapers in the classroom. All it takes is a phone call to The News at 265-8320 ext. 356. Summer Whitten would be happy to sign up teachers to get their newspapers twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.